

(near) Meeting House, Society of Friends  
Chappaqua, Westchester County,  
New York.

HABS No. 4-102

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NY  
60-CHARV  
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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

District No. 4  
Southern New York State

Historic American Buildings Survey  
Wm. Dewey Foster, District Officer,  
25 West 45th Street, New York City.

MEETING-HOUSE OF THE SOCIETY OF FRIENDS (QUAKERS)  
Chappaqua, Westchester Co., N. Y.

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Location

This old meeting-house of the Hicksite branch of the Society of Friends (Quakers) stands on the west side of Pines Bridge Road about two miles northwest of the Village of Chappaqua, in the Town of New Castle. This town, formerly part of the larger Town of North Castle, was still earlier included in the Manor of Scarsdale (granted by royal patent in 1701 to Caleb Heathcote), one of the six great manors that comprised the County of Westchester. The village, at first occupied by Indians and named by them Chappaqua, was settled by Quakers.

See Bolton's or Scharf's Hist. of Westchester Co.

Their "Meeting" was established in 1745, and held in private houses until this meeting-house was built in 1752-3.

Description and History

Considering that the building has been in regular use since it was erected, but slightly altered and repaired, it is in a remarkably good state of preservation. As viewed by the architects of the present survey, one sees a large frame building with clapboarded sides and two stories of windows, the second story inside being a balcony. The entire design is austere, reflecting the characteristic lack of ostentation of this sect. There is no enrichment, the few moldings being simple. Architecturally the exterior is unimpressive, but one is struck by the straightforwardness and suitability of the interior. It has an authentic atmosphere of high-minded worship.

Its story is found in the records of the Society which built it.

This has been gathered and written by Mr. John Cox, Jr., keeper of records and historian for Friends in both New York City and Chappaqua. Briefly, when Chappaqua Friends in 1752 desired a meeting-house, the Monthly Meeting of Mamaroneck appointed a committee who reported to the Quarterly Meeting that they had viewed a place "which may answer". A house 20 x 26 feet, having posts 18 feet high, was allowed, and a committee was directed to employ laborers and carpenters to build it. The North Castle Town records show that the house was there in 1753 by the time road districts were assigned, for these met "at the meeting house". In 1754, subscriptions were taken in both Monthly Meetings (Mamaroneck and Oblong) to pay for and finish the Chappaqua house.

In 1778 an addition was to be made to the north end of the building, 20 feet wide and 12 feet in breadth, 18 feet in height on the south and 10 feet on the north. This was reported not entirely finished, in 1780. Mr. Cox, himself an architect, explains: "I believe from this evidence and the lack of any other mention of the house (and the measurements agreeing) that part of the easterly two bays of the present house may have been built in 1753; that they were extended northerly in 1778 to the present depth of the building; and that, either then or at some date after 1785, the north extension was carried up full height and the present roof framed. Certainly the western three bays were added after all this had been done, and before 1800, but owing to the loss of the early minutes we do not know the date.

"In the middle of the last century, the shingled sides were covered with the present clapboarding, the roof slated, and part of the stone horse-block extending along two sides was covered by the present piazza.

"The interior is little changed, except by the removal of the sliding

partition in 1903. The deck-like curve of the gallery girders is due to the rain from the eaves settling the outer foundations. The present floor was laid level over the old curved floor. The walls were filled, in the original construction, with a mixture of clay, a little lime, and a little cut straw -- an early attempt to weather-proof a house. The oak posts are as clean cut and reliable as were the strong souls who framed and raised the house, and worshipped in it.

"After the lamentable Separation of 1828, the Orthodox branch built themselves a meeting house north of the old horse sheds. The houses were near enough so that, in summer with open doors, a speaker could preach to his congregation and at the other one, and it appears to have caused no trouble. In 1883, the latter house was removed, and the present meeting house on King Street in the village was built".

From Mr. Cox's account of the old meeting-house in  
The Quarterly Bulletin, Westchester Co. Historical  
Soc., Vol. 5, no. 3, July, 1929, pp. 65-68.

The position of the sliding partition which Mr. Cox mentions was along the central north-and-south line of posts. He has explained the use of such partition or shutters in his book on

Quakerism in New York City (1930), pp. 110-112:

"While Quakers have been noted for their recognition in theory of women's equality with men, this has not always been maintained in practice. Business meetings were held separately by men and women in Quaker meeting-houses. Partitions were so adjusted as to separate the two groups, who acted in a system similar to the two branches of a legislature".

For over a century and three-quarters this house has served in peace and war. After the battle of White Plains on Oct. 28, 1776, when

Washington retired with part of his army to a fortified camp at North Castle, he carted the wounded Continentals to this meeting-house which was offered as a temporary hospital. A bronze tablet by the roadside commemorates the heroism of those who died and were buried in the adjoining hillside cemetery.

Written, March 31, 1934, by

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